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## Save your appetite: Three iconic New York restaurants are coming back

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Russ & Daughters Café on Orchard Street on the Lower East Side.

After the events of 9/11, the Russ & Daughters store on the Lower East Side reopened the next day. When Superstorm Sandy shut off the neighborhood's electricity, a customer set up a makeshift generator, and the store opened its doors, although in a limited way.

"In both cases, I remember people saying, 'I know the city will be OK because Russ & Daughters is back,'" co-owner Niki Russ Federman said.

This time it was different. Although the company kept operating its Manhattan store and food production space in the Navy Yard, it took two years and four months for the Russ & Daughters Café on Orchard Street to reopen after it shuttered following pandemic restrictions in March 2020.

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"With this reopening, that's what I'm hearing and absorbing again," Russ Federman said. "If Russ & Daughters can come out on the other side, it can be a symbolic bookend to the crazy experience we have all been through."

The family-owned operation, which is more than a century old, is not alone among restaurants that have waited this long to reopen. Even as a share of city eateries have had to **close for good** because of the tough conditions, and a number of others have **sprung up**, a handful of long-closed spots are finally coming back during the summer.

## Russ & Daughters

For Russ & Daughters, an “incredible landlord” made the long closure possible. Russ Federman said the landlord asked the company what it needed to survive and accepted the rent abatement its leadership asked for. Meanwhile, the company’s **takeout and delivery business** was thriving.

“With those two things, we were able to get by and ride out the tunnel,” Russ Federman said. That meant the management never had to do contortions to try to make a profit when restaurant capacity was limited or enforce policy on vaccine cards or masks when the city mandated them.

Russ Federman said the team did try to reopen the café twice before—once in the summer of 2021 and once again in January. But each time a resurgence of Covid-19 got in the way. It wasn’t until the spring that Russ & Daughters’ management felt it had passed the major hurdles.

“As a 108-year-old business, we think in terms of the long term and never rush into anything,” she said.

Russ Federman said she left extra time for hiring, figuring the tight labor market might make it hard to build a team. Without so much as an announcement, the restaurant welcomed back customers on July 21. On Monday, the restaurant shared the news with its Instagram followers in a video that racked up more than 100,000 views. Nothing has changed in the décor, the service or the menu since early 2020.

“We just opened the doors,” Russ Federman said, “and we were full.”

## Maialino

The Union Square Hospitality Group restaurant Maialino, known for Roman dishes such as cacio e pepe and roast suckling pig, announced that it would be coming back in a temporary location, called Maialino (vicino) at the Redbury Hotel in NoMad in the fall.

The original Maialino opened at the Gramercy Park Hotel in 2009. Like others, both the restaurant and the hotel shut in March 2020. But the hotel, owned by Aby Rosen’s RFR Realty, ended up in a lawsuit over its unpaid \$5 million in annual rent and stayed shuttered. In June a judge ejected Rosen from the land lease for the hotel.

That left Maialino’s future up in the air. The team has kept hoping to reopen, said Katie

Reisert, a press representative for the company. In November 2021 Danny Meyer, founder and CEO of Union Square Hospitality Group, wrote in a tweet: "Today we continue to wait for the GPH hotel to reopen so that we can get back to cooking for you." In the meantime fans have been able to order a few Maialino favorites on the food-shipping platform Goldberry.

Moving to the Redbury presented an opportunity to bring back the original Maialino's energy, Reisert added, as well as many of the classic dishes. Eventually, Maialino wants to return to the Gramercy Park Hotel but will stay at the Redbury Hotel until then.

Maialino will replace Caffè Marchio and Vini e Fritti, two Union Square Hospitality concepts that were already in the Redbury. Meyer's pizza spot, Marta, is also inside the hotel.

### **Mermaid Inn-East Village**

The 19-year-old seafood restaurant has taken more than two years to get its Second Avenue location back up and running after March 2020.

In August 2020, co-owner Daniel Abrams told Eater that he had not worked out a rent deal with the landlord and would close the site for good.

But by the spring of 2021, the restaurant had announced plans to reopen. Then came a new obstacle: Because the restaurant had closed, it had to reapply for its liquor license.

The new liquor license was not the only part of re-opening that felt more like opening, said Abrams.

"If it had been closed for three months and 30% of servers were coming back and 60% of the kitchen staff—it would be easy," he said. After more than a year, though, "it's all from scratch." In addition, he had three other spots to get back on track—Upper West Side Mermaid Inn, Greenwich Village Mermaid Oyster Bar, Chelsea Mermaid Inn. A new venture, Mermaid Mexicana, opened in May for the first time.

"To get four open in 10 months was unrealistic," he said. In addition, after so long a closure, the interior of the East Village location needed a paint job, new finishes on the floor and some updated kitchen equipment.

Finally, on July 18, blog [EV Grieve](#) noted that signage had gone up on the window, announcing hiring plans. A recent job posting for a general manager also appeared on hiring site Culinary Agents. Abrams and co-owner Cindy Smith are simultaneously

working on a project much bigger than their original 29-seat location on Second Ave: a 15,500-square-foot restaurant at 127 W. 43rd St. in Times Square. They also operate three other locations, in Chelsea, Greenwich Village and on the Upper West Side.

*This story has been updated with quotes from Abrams.*

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